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When the fronds are dry the stiff mid-rib is stripped from each individual leaf. The leaves then are smoothed by running them over the back of a knife or seashell. Buri leaves are cut into fairly regular widths by use of a rattan guide (bataean). (See Plate LXXI.)[1] The bataean is hooked around a leaf and a small knife inserted just above the notch facing the worker; it penetrates the leaf to a second notch on the back of the bataean. By moving the bataean and the knife down the leaf together an even strip is cut. Buri strips, ready for weaving, are called lila.

After a sufficient supply of lilas is prepared, the plaiting of the bag or mat is begun. The only type of plaiting used is illustrated in Plate LXX. Strands used to plait mats and baskets are fairly broad and flat, producing a checkerboard type of design; actually little can be done in plaiting such strands except to pass them alternately over and under. Sleeping mats, unlike bags, are usually plaited with a double thickness. Only one woman in Caticugan made any attempt to decorate her buri bags. The sibokao tree's heartwood makes a brown dye; sometimes, though rarely, she used tanbark as a dye "because I do not have to buy the sibokao to make a dye." She dyed a few buri strips, plaiting them into the bag, making a simple geometric design. Plate LXX, C, illustrates the design made in some placemats she plaited for me.

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The decreasing number of buri palms in the vicinity of Caticugan may pose a problem for the barriofolk in the

1 [See p. 705, cat. 285 -- Analyst]

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Most abaca used for weaving is bought in the northern barrios of Bantolinao and Nasig-id. Several women were furnished abaca by the owner who later received one-half of the cloth.

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Fiber to be woven must be stripped from the abaca plant with special care; for example, no pulp should remain on the fiber. Often growers who sell abaca to the Chinese in Siaton poblacion purposely leave pulp on the fibers so the bundles will weigh more.

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Dyes

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Three vegetable dyes, tagun, taloto, and antipolo, were once used to dye colored weft thread for abaca cloth. Tagun (Indigofera suffruticosa Mill) grows wild in the nearby hills; once in the past it was cultivated as a source of black dye. Domesticated tagun, according to the barriofolk, made a better dye than the wild variety. Water was heated and tagun leaves were added; a little lime was then sprinkled into this mixture and care taken lest the water boil. "If the water boiled," one woman explained, "the dye was not any good because the leaves became tender right away." Bark of the taloto and antipolo trees was powdered to make a red dye. Red fibers were sometimes re-dyed with tagun "so they would be reddish and very shiny." Today these vegetable dyes are rarely, if ever, used. Weavers buy chemical dyes in the poblacion; a package of four different dyes costs ten cents.

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